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SOURCE Neue Deutsche Presse, No 4, 1951.INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN PRESS AND GOVERNMENT IN THE GDR

Gerhard Zadek

It is the task of the democratic press to help in the clarification and popularization of government policies, measures, and regulations in connection with the achievement of the government's vast work program. It is a long way from the initial idea to its rough draft, from the acceptance to the final enforcement of a law or regulation. This goal can be achieved successfully only if the craftsman and the peasant, the student or the resettler thoroughly grasps, fully understands, and knows how to apply the regulations and measures of the government.

Popularizing the Laws, the Most Important Task

By now, it is evident that living conditions throughout the country are steadily improving. This fact testifies that the resolutions of our government were not idle promises, but that they were fulfilled and given meaning and power through the initiative of the parties and mass organizations, the millions of workers in plants and on farms. More than ever, most papers of the democratic press reflect the new consciousness of the citizens of our young democratic republic, a consciousness expressed in industry by the steadily growing movement of the activists and quality workers who make the most of every second, every penny, and every gram, and in management by the fierce battle against bureaucracy, arrogance, and self-confidence.

However, to promote and expedite this development, cooperation between the democratic press and administration, between the editorial offices, the ministries, and particularly the Office of Information, must be more active and closer. Our government considers the support of the democratic press of major importance; a special section of the official regulations concerns this cooperation.

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It is expressly pointed out that the government welcomes cooperation between administrative personnel and the press. Therefore, when members of our news-staff meet employees in administration offices who are "hostile to the press," and who dismiss cooperation with the press with a shrug of their shoulders, who will deal with the press only when the latter has too justly criticized and found fault with them, they should remind such bureaucrats of the official regulations of their own office.

#### Intermediary Between Government and Press

This role should fall principally to the Office of Information and particularly to the main press division, which, through press secretaries of the ministries, state secretaries, and government administrative and other offices, controls an extensive communications network to support the democratic press in its work. The main press division should be the bridge across which a considerable portion of guiding directives will pass and debates be conducted. These the press itself will evaluate according to its own judgment and taking its own particular group of readers into account. Only a limited number of important problems and questions concerning government policy can be reviewed through the customary press bulletins, press conferences, or press tours.

It is of particular importance to the democratic administration that the press point out existing vaguenesses and shortcomings, and, together with the administration, clarify and improve these. The increasing confidence that the press enjoys on the part of the people has been proven by the inquiries of the readers, who regard "their paper" as an intermediary and assistant to whom they can turn with confidence. The letters to the editor and contributions from readers are eloquent testimony of the close contact the press has achieved with its readers.

#### Close Contact Between Press and Administration Helps Remedy Abuses

In executing this important function of the press, the main press division can undertake measures to remedy abuses through close cooperation with individual editorial offices and appropriate intercession with the responsible ministries. The following examples should serve as an incentive to our democratic press to become an organ close to its people, with every printed page and even every line working toward this goal.

In one of our rural papers a reader exposed the behavior of one Dr Kluge of Nauen, Kreis Osthavelland, a physician who refused treatment to a patient because at the time he did not have office hours at night or on Sunday. The Office of Information acted immediately on this report and requested the Ministry of Labor and Health to investigate the matter. The press spokesman of the ministry acted promptly. Only a few days after the critical article had appeared in the paper, the doctor in question was summoned to appear in person before Steidle, Minister of Labor and Health to explain the matter. Moreover, the Ministry of Labor and Health made a complete check-up on medical care in Kreis Nauen and took the necessary measures to improve it.

In an open letter to the editor, later forwarded to the Office of Information, the writer described the medieval conditions existing in Roedelin (Brandenburg), the village in which he is living. In connection with this letter, labor investigators found out that a farmer worked children under 14 years of age 9½ hours a day at 20 Pfennig per hour. Teacher Arno Richter harnessed three children to a plow and thus plowed approximately one Morgen (0.631 acres) of land. Despite a report made by a labor investigator to the Potsdam Administration and to the Templin Board of Education, the aforementioned conditions were not remedied. In this case as well, the Office of Information took immediate action and brought the unbearable conditions in Roedelin to the attention of the responsible ministry, which remedied this abuse immediately and called the responsible persons to account.

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Naturally, our responsible editorial offices will be able to judge, before publication of any communication received, whether to get in touch with the Office of Information or directly with the appropriate office.

Quite frequently one finds cases like the following, which are prompted by ignorance of the new democratic laws: the amount of pension funds or loans was either found to be incorrect or was not received at all; youths were denied skilled training, despite provisions made by the protective labor laws for minors; schools and children's homes, still occupied by various offices, plants, or private industry, have not been given back to their original occupants, as provided by the statute for minors, issued as early as February of last year.

Several press referents and members of our association, for example, our colleague Gruetzke from the Ministry of Health, or our colleague Sauheittl from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, have taken a particularly salutary initiative to remedy abuses, to provide examples for the press from the ministry's realm of activities and duties, and thus promote the quickest and widest application of the laws. But nevertheless, it often happens that news items will appear without comment, one could say without understanding for existing conditions and thus irritate the reader. This happens particularly when problems of production, supply, or the economy are involved. Certain actual cases have been the reason for emphasizing the fact that editorial offices are welcome to check with the responsible ministries and are sure to receive the information requested. This is the only way that every individual news report, every event, can be explained in relation to government policy, which is conducted with the people's interest in mind.

#### Office Bulletins Assisting in the Daily Routine

Government policy and the activity of the ministries, with their tasks and problems, should be reflected in the news service (feature stories) and the press releases given out by the main press division of the Office of Information.

In very few lines, and using concrete examples and appropriate commentary, press releases treat the most important questions which are vital for carrying out the measures taken by the government. In selecting news items for press releases, major importance is placed on the most important campaigns being conducted in the press.

The following example, which has been cited by the administration and reported by several newspapers, will bear out the importance of proper exploitation of such press releases.

It is a well-known fact that even today, citizens requesting or applying for something from the government or other authorities must go through extensive red tape and other obstacles which require a great deal of time and necessitate filling of complicated questionnaires. To eliminate this procedure a new method should be devised. The attitude of the individual citizen toward the government depends upon the contact he has had with some official representing the government of a village, town, or Kreis. Last summer, a report was published to the effect that a centralized registration office had been established in the towns of Halle and Magdeburg to facilitate the process of registration or reporting of departure. These centralized registration points combined offices of the people's police, housing authorities, Department of Labor and Social Welfare, and the Ministry of Trade and Supply. Thus, it became possible to take care of all formalities speedily in one operation and with one registration form, something which formerly required much valuable time. Now, several months later, many towns have followed the example of Halle and Magdeburg, as a result of the publicity given this new method by the press.

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It is felt that not only press releases but particularly bulletins dealing with the Soviet press and the press of the People's Democracies should be utilized to better advantage. Experience gained from the USSR has almost unlimited potentialities if applied properly to our 1951 National Economic Plan; in this way, it can be instrumental in the speedy reconstruction of our country.

Just as the practical scientific knowledge of the USSR helps our technicians and engineers, so does Soviet agricultural experience help us in carrying out our cultivation plan.

#### New Type of Press Conference

Our democratic newspapers are no longer mere chroniclers, but today are actual exponents and molders of public opinion. The press conferences held at the Office of Information should, above all, serve to help the press fulfill its aim. The topics discussed at these press conferences, whether they deal with the gradual lifting of rationing or the drop in HO prices, etc., are indicative of the phases of our progress. Discussions at the press conferences are pertinent and serious. Therefore, attention should be called again and again to the government announcement made by Otto Grotewohl:

"No one should be under the impression that when these improvements have been made, it will be a life of milk and honey; any further improvement will depend on an increase in production and quality standards."

Our editorial offices should therefore realize that it is not the job of the press to demand promiscuously but rather to explain what can be done so that more will be done. Such outspoken discussions have become routine at these press conferences.

"If it serves the information of the public or the reconstruction of the republic, no question will be left unanswered," is the unwritten law of the press conferences. Not only representatives of the democratic daily or weekly papers, but also numerous publishers of house organs of our large national plants, representatives of machine rental stations, union functionaries, and even housewives take part in these press conferences. These discussions, questions, and answers have come to be an integral part of press conferences. Participants have ample opportunity to talk with the leading personalities of our government and public offices and to submit their suggestions.

Participants will no doubt remember last year's press conference at the Steinsaal of the Office of Information, during which a representative of Reuters in Berlin, John Peet, rose and, to the surprise of the audience and in the presence of former colleagues, announced: "I am tired of working for warmongers. Against my own volition I have become a tool of the American war machinery," and in the course of his discussion revealed some of the deceitful methods of the warmongering press. On this occasion, as it has often happened, the press conference turned into an international forum; incidentally, the only press conference throughout Germany where representatives of the Western and foreign press met, including people from the Associated Press to Le Monde and from Dagens Nyheter to Neue Zuercher Zeitung. The Office of Information has given these press representatives ample opportunity to convince themselves of the real facts, not only during the press conferences but also on trips within the German Democratic Republic. I would like to call attention to only one incident during a trip to Heiligenstadt, on the border of the British Zone, where English officers refused admittance to thousands of German immigrants from Poland, whose home actually was in West Germany. Another

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occasion was the inspection of a mass grave of German soldiers close to Loessauer Kurve, near Frankfurt/Oder. Representatives of the Western press were remarkably busy writing everything down, but their newspapers or news agencies published hardly anything about it, or else made untrue and distorted statements. Our press representatives have not left their readers uninformed with regard to these facts.

#### Press Tours Through the Republic

No editor in his office can do his own job successfully without convincing himself, through personal observation, of the tempo of our democratic reconstruction, without actually going to the factories or the machine rental stations to speak personally with the activists and tractor drivers there. The trip taken by the press under the slogan "1,000 Kilometers of Democratic Reconstruction" was planned particularly for the benefit of those editors who seldom get a chance to leave their editorial offices, so that they might obtain factual evidence of actual developments and later be able to write more effective and graphic reports. This 8-day journey, in which many representatives of the foreign democratic press as well as influential editors of our press participated, turned out to be quite an experience for everyone. During this tour, the following were some of the points of interest visited: Wilhelm Pieck, Synthetic Fiber Plant, Stralsund Shipyard, a machine rental station in Thuringen, and agricultural schools and newly settled villages in Sachsen-Anhalt. Casual chatting developed readily with activists and farmers, teachers, students, mayors, and government ministers, even our President, Wilhelm Pieck, permitted himself to be interviewed at Schwarza. Our foreign colleagues, however, were not satisfied until they actually helped for several hours, with hoe and spade, in the clearing of debris in Bruchstedt, a village ruined by a natural disaster.

This trip was of particular significance to the German participants, since they had the opportunity to observe and gain by the work methods of our foreign friends, to get to know them, and to make friends with them. Several such press tours have been planned for this year, too.

The purpose of this article, which throws light on a small part of the activities of a government agency created expressly to support the democratic press, will have been accomplished if cooperation between press and administration, in the interests of our peaceful democratic reconstruction, is even closer in the future.

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